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New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Solíz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. De Mistura is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a pleasure, Mr. President, to see you presiding over today's meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like to start by giving a summary of what is our own analysis based on the latest developments and of some of the possible future steps ahead. As usual in Syria, we have a mixed picture, and that is what I would like to refer to.

There have been some interesting technical steps taken in advance of the seventh round of intra-Syrian talks, which, as Council members know very well by now, will take place from 10 to 14 July. In addition, there are currently serious efforts under way to deliver further agreements, in particular an implementation agreement regarding the de-escalation zones, before an Astana meeting that is planned for 4 and 5 July. But there have also been some worrying developments that we cannot ignore and upon which I will elaborate. We are at the time of testing whether or not the political will exists for real de-escalation and more meaningful political talks and for moving beyond preparatory talks.

Throughout this period, the United Nations has been quite active, convening joint technical meetings with opposition experts seeking to support the efforts of the Astana guarantors on de-escalation, consulting widely, including in Moscow and Paris, and with many others, laying the basis for a new round of Geneva talks, and holding consultations with our colleagues in the European Union. I would like to map this out for the Council and look to where we can go next.

In the latest round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, I announced the establishment of a technical consultative process, which Council members might remember. It was the additional layer that we believe could be very helpful in actually abolishing layers by accelerating the real talks. This technical consultative process was meant to develop relevant options on constitutional and legal issues that would need to be considered and resolved anyway in relation to any proposal or position put forward in the formal sessions. This was designed in fact to help the formal talks make progress more expeditiously due to better preparation by ensuring that any negotiated transitional political process would enjoy solid technical, constitutional and legal foundations.

I can offer an example. Some time ago, as Council members will remember, we had a moment of truth in Afghanistan. This was many years ago. I was around then and some Council members here today were, too. There was a feeling that nothing was moving forward until a certain point, when there was a rush for a conference in Bonn. Much of the preparatory work, which sometimes appears to be tedious or inconclusive, I have been told by those who were part of the Bonn conference, was immediately put into action and utilized as homework prepared for the conference. In a certain way, we are doing something similar, doing our homework as we wait for the real, major Geneva conference, God willing.

We made it clear that the consultative process created was technical. It is also true and well known that everything we do is political, but the particular emphasis in this case was on the words "technical", "experts" and "non-binding in nature". It was and is not designed to act as a negotiating forum to take on the political responsibility of the formal sessions or to take on itself the Syrian people's right to determine the constitutional future of the State of Syria, but it is a serious process because it does prepare for all of that.

Council members will recall that both the Government and the three opposition invitees in the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva all agreed last time, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), to participate in separate consultations and the consultative process. We were able to do so separately for at least two days, but since then we have seen a potentially significant new development. On 15 and 16 June, a few days ago,

opposition experts from the high-level negotiations committee and the Cairo and the Moscow platforms jointly convened and sat down together in the same room in Geneva at the behest of the United Nations, within the framework of the consultative process. That was the first time a joint set of United Nations meetings with the opposition invitees in one room had taken place — not only according to protocol but in a context of substantive discussions among them and us, which lasted the entire day. We believe that we must build on that.

The opposition experts worked to develop joint technical options with regard to the schedule process for drafting a new Constitution and its popular approval. They also discussed the principles involved, covering the substance of what are known as the living 12 points, which we had put forward in the fourth round of talks. The experts also discussed those issues in the context of a negotiated, political transition process within the framework of relevant Security Council resolutions.

While such expert meetings are by nature exploratory and non-binding, the joint meeting brought to light welcome similarities and common technical and perhaps even political understanding of various issues and could potentially be the beginning of a greater technical coordination among the three groups. We hope that the Security Council will help us support the three groups in that regard so as to show unity. The participants felt that additional work could yield even more productive results. My Office has accordingly invited them to participate next week in a further set of joint meetings within the framework of the consultative process on constitutional and legal issues ahead of the seventh round of formal intra-Syrian talks to take place in July.

Members will recall that the Government of Syria — which was, by the way, the first to commit to the technical process — communicated to me that it would participate in expert meetings within the framework of the technical consultations process during formal sessions of the intra-Syrian talks, but not outside those formal occasions. I therefore look forward to experts from my team continuing during the seventh round the engagement that began with experts from the Government during the sixth round. Of course, the United Nations remains ready to engage with the Government experts at any mutually convenient time, including before and after formal talks.

In my formal invitation to the forthcoming round of the intra-Syrian talks, I encouraged invitees to prepare actively. I therefore look forward to their engaging in an intensified set of discussions on issues across all four baskets: Governance issues, constitutional issues, electoral issues and counter-terrorism, security-governance and medium-term confidence-building issues. I hope that it will be possible to accelerate the peace talks. I am giving consideration, in fact, to sharing some of my own thinking on certain issues so as to stimulate discussions among the parties.

If the environment is propitious, I am also ready to facilitate direct talks between the Government and the opposition and hopefully unify the opposition in those talks, either at the formal or technical level. That is something that, on more than one occasion, all sides have stated that they want, and I hope that conditions are being established that could enable such a scenario. I also believe that it is important to aim for a further round of talks near the end of August or the beginning of September in advance of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly in September.

Both during and between the upcoming rounds of formal talks and expert meetings, my team will continue to closely engage with the members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and civil society support groups and listen to their own suggestions and practical advice. In particular, my team and I continue to strive to engage and give priority to more women's organizations, including those working across and inside Syria during and between rounds of intra-Syrian talks. In that context, I should note that, following the last round of intra-Syrian talks, we initiated our civil society role, which allowed us to consult with more than 50 civil society organizations and experts from all walks of life in various areas of expertise from both within and outside Syria. The more that we engage with such interlocutors, the more we are convinced that civil society will be critical to preserving and regenerating the social cohesion of a country that for too long has been torn apart by war.

As we advance the overall political effort unfolding under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva, the efforts of the three guarantors of the Astana process continue to finalize modalities for the implementation of the memorandum of understanding on the four de-escalation zones that they concluded on 4 May. As mentioned, a meeting of the guarantors is planned to take place in Astana on 4 and 5 July. I plan to be

present at that meeting. With every week that passes, as we know, without a final arrangement to finalize those zones, the fragility of the ceasefire regime and the risk posed by that fragility increase. I am aware of the genuine efforts currently being undertaken to try to end and overcome the remaining obstacles, as was witnessed by my own team of experts from my own Office during the recently held technical-level meeting of the joint working group on de-escalation in Moscow.

The United Nations team continues to stand ready to provide technical advice whenever and wherever needed because we need success in Astana, just as Astana desperately needs success in the Geneva political process so as to consolidate what we are all trying to do. Let us therefore give de-escalation a fair chance to succeed because that is what people are asking so as to further decrease the violence and enable confidence-building. I also expressed the hope that the discussions aimed at finding a suitable formula for addressing the difficult situations that have emerged in the southern part of Syria will also yield positive results.

As we plan for the Geneva intra-Syrian talks and as the Astana guarantors work towards de-escalation, let us recall what has been achieved and some of the challenges that remain on the ground. Since the three guarantor States signed the de-escalation memorandum in Astana on 4 May, the level of violence has clearly decreased. Hundreds of Syrian lives continue to be spared every week, and many towns have returned to some degree of normalcy. That is a good general trend, but we do not see that same good trend everywhere. In some areas, the fighting and violence have continued and, in fact, intensified.

On the other hand, we must recognize that regrettably, the general significant improvement of the security situation has not yielded equally significant progress in providing humanitarian access to areas where needs are greatest. The support of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) co-chairs and of other members of the ISSG has been helpful and efforts continue. However, let us be honest — much more needs to be done and urgently to enable safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to all Syrians, wherever they are, in particular hard-to-reach areas.

Let me also stress the importance of moving forward on the issues of detainees, abductees, missing people and on the important issue of humanitarian demining. In that regard, I would like to thank the United Nations Mine Action Service for its continuing engagement.

We note that the fight against terrorists appears to be proceeding with Da'esh under pressure and in retreat in various locations in Syria. At the same time, incidents between the international coalition to counter Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh and forces of the Government of Syria and its allies, including the downing of a Syrian military plane, have taken place. As I see it, we hope that the ideal trajectory over the coming two weeks could be — indeed, would be — progress in Astana on 4 and 5 July; a further set of joint technical aspect meetings with opposition groups during that same week; and continuing discussion and dialogue among the main international stakeholders, including at the Group of 20 Summit in Hamburg on 7 and 8 July, at which the issue of Syria will most certainly be discussed. That is all in support of the Astana de-escalation efforts and the intra-Syrian Geneva-based political process.

I hope that a combination of all those elements will help shape an environment that is conducive to the next round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva in the coming months and bring us one step closer on the journey to our shared goal of implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions and, in particular resolution 2254 (2015). All political efforts of the United Nations are directed towards that end and, with the guidance of the Secretary-General, we continue to count on the strong support of all members of the Security Council, as a whole.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. de Mistura for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): There is no doubt that the crisis in Syria is one of the most serious topics under consideration by the Security Council. That is why my delegation, which represents an elected member of the Security Council, understands that it has a duty to share its opinion on such a grave international issue with the Council's electorate — its members.

Once again, we thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and his entire team for their tireless efforts in the

quest for a political solution in Syria, and we reiterate Uruguay's full confidence in their efforts.

We acknowledge the announcement of the resumption of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, which will begin on 10 July, as well as the intention to convene successive meetings in the coming months. We commend Mr. De Mistura on the fact that representatives of civil society organizations, in particular women's organizations, will take part in all meetings to be held in Geneva. The role played by civil society organizations and by women's organizations in particular is extremely important and could contribute immensely to the discussions.

Following the conclusion of the sixth round of talks and ongoing contact and discussions with the parties since then, maintaining the momentum of the meetings in Geneva was required in order to work on implementing agreements made and to allow for tangible progress to be made on the four baskets of topics highlighted in the road map provided by resolution 2254 (2015). At the same time, the meeting that will be held next week in Astana will provide an opportunity to reinforce the cessation of hostilities agreement and to draft the details for the implementation of the safe zones that were established at the beginning at the beginning of May by the three guarantor countries.

Almost two months after the signing of the memorandum establishing the safe zones, which Uruguay believes was a major step forward in strengthening the cessation of hostilities agreement and in reducing extreme violence in the majority of the country, we still do not have official information on the implementation of the agreement and we are concerned about the fact that unhindered access to those areas has not been granted to the United Nations. We reiterate that it is crucial for the guarantor countries to ensure humanitarian access and the free movement of people wishing to enter and leave those areas at will.

The Geneva and Astana processes are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. It is for that reason that tangible results must be achieved in Astana in order to reduce violence and guarantee the cessation of hostilities in the four safe zones. In that way, the next round of Geneva talks will take place in a positive environment in which further progress can be made.

On previous occasions, we have mentioned that the United Nations and the Special Envoy are not the protagonists in the tragedy that has been taking place in Syria since 2011; they merely mediate between the parties. The primary responsibility for ending the conflict lies directly with the Syrians themselves — on the one hand, the Government and, on the other, all individuals and entities that make up the opposition, including the almost 100 armed groups that operate in Syria, many of them with fighters, funding and foreign military support. The absurd fragmentation of the Syrian opposition, along with the foreign presence and military support, exacerbate an already major problem. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy to guarantee the inclusiveness of the process of political transition in Syria and we are pleased to be able to acknowledge the fact that civil society, including religious leaders and women's groups, is taking part.

Another kind of responsibility lies with third States, in the region and outside of it, that directly or indirectly take part in the situation in Syria, working towards objectives that are almost always far removed from the real goals and aspirations of the Syrian people. In that regard, Uruguay understands that the Security Council's responsibility in this issue is to continue applying pressure and persuasion to ensure that the parties to the conflict remain at the negotiating table in order to make gradual progress on the road map outlined in resolution 2254 (2015).

It is more important now than ever to strengthen political will in the three multilateral forums in which the crisis in Syria is being discussed: the Security Council, negotiations in Geneva, and the Astana process. A few days ago marked a year and a half since the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015). At the time, all of us present knew that we had a historic opportunity to end the crisis. Regrettably, despite the good intentions of the Special Envoy and successive efforts to implement the resolution's provisions, little progress has been made on the road map since then.

In addition to the enormous humanitarian costs of the crisis in Syria, the conflict has also been a driver of violent extremism and fundamentalist terrorism and, consequently, is a key factor in instability in the Middle East and in the rest of the world.

In conclusion, we reiterate our belief that there is no place for a military solution to the conflict. Only through a political transition process, implemented by the Syrians and mediated by the United Nations, will we be able to emerge from this web and stop the humanitarian tragedy.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, for his insightful update and commend him for his exceptional commitment and determination to pursue peace in Syria. My delegation would like to share the following observations and recommendations.

On the purely political track, Kazakhstan remains committed to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to ensuring the continuity of State institutions. My country is pleased to note the gradual progress in the political settlement of the Syrian conflict during the Geneva and Astana meetings.

We draw attention to the reduced military activity and improvement of the humanitarian situation in the four de-escalation zones. Astana reaffirms its readiness to further promote the political process to achieve peace and stability in Syria.

Like others, we call on members of the Security Council to use their influence in order to consolidate the national ceasefire regime and contribute to the success of agreements reached in Astana. We call on Council members to unanimously support the Geneva and Astana platforms, as well as the additional mechanisms developed within them, such as the memorandum on de-escalation zones. Such a joint approach would help to produce a ceasefire and to oblige the Syrian Government and rebel forces to end their battles.

Kazakhstan considers it both useful and relevant to agree on an additional format for United Nations interaction with the parties to the conflict through informal technical meetings of experts, at which issues related to the Syrian constitution are discussed. We support Special Envoy De Mistura's view that these technical meetings can become an opportunity to unite the opposing platforms. Let us endeavour to bring about a new peaceful life in Syria. We welcome and support the multifaceted diplomacy he is conducting to resolve the Syrian crisis. We believe that the more countries are positively involved in the solution of the Syrian question, the sooner we will see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Kazakhstan believes that in searching for an exit strategy, a regional approach should be considered as a very effective method to mitigate the situation and prevent further deterioration. We therefore call on all Middle Eastern/Gulf region States to join the guarantor countries and do everything possible to ensure that the ceasefire regime is respected and observed by all parties.

It is clear that to see further progress, there is a strong need to continue supporting the objectives and gains made thus far in the Astana and Geneva negotiations and through the other three guarantors in order to see further positive outcomes.

On the counter-terrorism track, in our opinion the inconsistency of the struggle against terrorist organizations in Syria slows down the political settlement significantly. Actions based on the "we will manage ourselves" principle are counterproductive, and their consequences are predictable and hazardous. We call on the international coalition forces operating in the provinces of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor to exercise caution in conducting military operations with a view to averting accidental civilian deaths, including of women and children. We recognize the need for further joint international efforts to counter the constant terrorist and extremist threats, which must be coordinated between the various sides through a unified strategy.

On the humanitarian track, we emphasize the importance of expanding humanitarian assistance to Syria, including an increase in medical assistance to civilians in areas where the ceasefire is respected. Rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access should be provided and conditions created to deliver medical aid to the local population to meet their basic needs. Aviation targets identified by any party should exclude such infrastructure facilities as bridges, oil and gas wells, dams and power plants — in other words, all critical infrastructure. We have a moral duty not to drive the future generation of Syrians into burdensome bondage, requiring them to rebuild every structure that has been destroyed.

Finally, the focus of the Syrian political track must now be on establishing sound governance, the formulation and consolidation of a new constitution, as well as new, United Nations-supervised elections. It is therefore important to preserve unity among the Council members, as demonstrated in the adoption of resolution 2336 (2016). Only then can there be determined action to speedily alleviate the burden of long-protracted war on the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.